



JESUSITA & TEA FIRES

Protecting Your Septic Systems After the Fire

Building & Safety Division
City of Santa Barbara
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A properly sized and functioning septic system is essential to the long-term enjoyment of your property. Unless you plan to connect to the public sewer or completely replace the entire system, it is important to protect your investment in this onsite wastewater utility.

The following suggestions are provided to help you protect your septic system and assist in the permitting of the onsite septic system with both the County and City agencies.

- **Locate and flag your septic tank and disposal field prior to debris removal, while familiar features such as the house foundation are still visible.**
In order to facilitate the rebuilding process, it is vital to know the location and size of the septic tank and disposal field on your property. Archival records typically take measurements from structures, so it is important to locate the system components before the foundation is removed.
- **Do not allow heavy equipment to drive over the septic system components.**
Flag and protect the system so that the tank and disposal field are not crushed or destroyed during the debris removal, clean-up, grading or rebuilding activities. Concrete septic tanks are relatively sturdy. Plastic or fiberglass tanks and leach lines are easily damaged by heavy loads. Some older systems were constructed with hollow pits or chambers which could present a serious safety hazard.
- **Cap off the building sewer (waste line which joins the structure to the tank) prior to site clean-up activities to ensure that this pipe remains free of dirt and debris.**

Have the septic tank pumped by a licensed pumping company to ensure that it is structurally sound and that debris has not entered the tank. The waste line leading out of the tank to the disposal area should also be inspected with a video camera to make sure it is still functional and to determine its size and location. This is especially important for older systems which may utilize inferior materials or hollow seepage pits which present a potentially serious safety hazard. Over time, the concrete top on the pit deteriorates and can collapse unexpectedly under stress or load.

Have the building sewer inspected & tested. Septic system components which are buried in the ground (such as the building sewer, tanks and leach lines) have a good chance of surviving the heat of a fire. Some older systems may incorporate underground chambers that could collapse during clean up or rebuilding activities and therefore present a potential safety hazard. The building sewer is probably plastic and should be inspected to make sure it has not been melted or otherwise compromised. Now, before debris removal, is the time to make sure that the system is located and flagged to prevent accidents or damage to your system from heavy equipment, grading, or traffic during debris removal and site preparation for rebuilding.

A copy of the pump and inspection report(s) needs to be submitted to the building department when you apply to get a building permit for your residence.

See our separate flyer for a partial list of companies that can assist you in determining the adequacy and condition of your septic system.